

Becoming Who We Are: The Salesian Center for Faith and Culture at DeSales University

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ABSTRACT

Catholic universities seek to provide students with not simply information for a career, but also a formation for life. At one institution, this goal is expressed in a tag line adapted from St. Francis de Sales: “Be who you are and be that well.” How can this motto characterize the institution itself and distinguish it from its educational peers? A center with the purpose to promote academic study, perpetuate a spiritual tradition, and provide community interaction provides one means for reaching these goals. This article offers an example of how a Catholic college or university might maintain and advance its foundational charism. It does this by summarizing the genesis and ten-year history of the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture at DeSales University; linking the center’s mission to this distinct spiritual tradition; assessing the fulfillment of the center’s goals to date; and recognizing the impact the center has on the university, society, and the Church.

“Be who you are and be that well.” Though adapted from a four-century-old letter, these words of St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622)—whether quoted as a leadership lesson,¹ modified for a military recruitment campaign,² or adopted as a tag line that expresses the Salesian mission in the world of Catholic higher education—still ring true in many ways today. In its original context, the exhortation issues pastoral advice to the president of the Burgundian Parliament’s wife, Madame Marie

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¹ Steve Arneson, “Leadership Lessons: Be Who You Are,” *Leadership Examiner*, <http://www.examiner.com/x-652-Leadership-Examiner~y2009m1d12-Leadership-lessons-Be-who-you-are>.

² Carl Rochelle, “Army Retires ‘Be All You Can Be’ Jingle,” CNN.com, <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/01/10/new.army/index.html>.

Bourgeois Brûlart. In his letter to her, the wise Bishop of Geneva uses his typical imaginative style to counsel a moderation of excessive desires and misplaced fervor for holiness:

Do not love anything too much, I beg you, not even virtues, which we sometimes lose by our excessive zeal....Let us be what we are and be that well, in order to bring honor to the Master Craftsman whose handiwork we are. People laughed at the painter who, intending to paint a horse, came up with a perfect bull; the work was handsome in itself, but not much credit to the artist who had had other plans and succeeded in this one only by chance. Let us be what God wants us to be, provided we are His, and let us not be what we would like to be, contrary to His intention. Even if we were the most perfect creatures under heaven, what good would that do us if we were not as God's will would have us be?³

Reducing this teaching to a pithy and memorable jingle offers a life-long outcome for university students whose education is intended to provide them with a formation for life, not simply information for a career. While that goal may be admirable for students, can that same slogan characterize the institution itself? In other words, how might a university become what it is? How will it fulfill its distinctive mission in an environment inhabited by so many other, similar Catholic colleges and universities?

One answer is through the support of a special center that has the dual role to unite the various dimensions of life on campus—as the hub unites the spokes of a wheel—and to provide a critical point of contact with the community beyond the campus. That is, in sum, the function of the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture at DeSales University. This article will summarize this center's genesis and its ten-year history; link its mission to the Salesian tradition; assess the fulfillment of its goals to date; and recognize its potential impact on the university, society, and the Church. In doing so, it will explicate one important way by which any Catholic college or university might maintain and advance its foundational charism.

³ Letter CCLXXXIX, dated June 10, 1605, in vol. XIII of the *Oeuvres de Saint François de Sales, Évêque et prince de Genève et Docteur de l'Église*, édition complète (Annecy: Monastère de la Visitation, 1894), 53-54. Translation by Péronne Marie Thibert, V.H.M. in *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction*, selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power, O.S.F.S. (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 111.

Establishing a University Center

The Salesian Center for Faith and Culture owes its genesis to two happenings, one recent and one long past. In 1999 the trustees of Allentown College of St. Francis de Sales decided to change the charter of the then thirty-five-year-old institution to become a master's level, comprehensive university. Among the initiatives adopted in their strategic plan was that the new DeSales University would focus "institutional energy upon the integration of Salesian spirituality and contemporary social problems/solutions so that our many constituencies can more effectively contribute to the betterment of culture."⁴

One of the requirements of the accreditation process stipulated institutional support for research. While faculty previously had engaged in professional development activities within their respective fields, no on-campus entity existed to facilitate such work.

Recognizing this need and aligning it with an institutional desire to be the global locus for academic studies related to the Salesian heritage (since DeSales University is the only institution of higher education in the United States directly related to this tradition), the idea for a special center was born. A senior faculty member was given a one-semester sabbatical to investigate similar institutes and to develop a business plan for the approval of the trustees; this approval was then granted during the Spring 2000 semester.

The idea, however, had even deeper roots. In seventeenth-century France, a chief concern of the time—a century after the Reformation and a half-century after the Council of Trent—focused on improving religious knowledge amid an increasingly educated populace. Francis de Sales, later acclaimed a Doctor of the Church, recognized the connection between proper learning and good living. A student of letters in Paris and of law in Padua, he had a profound interest in the natural sciences and their application in the field of medicine; indeed, during a severe illness, he is said to have humbly offered to donate his body to the medical students at the University of Padua "so that—having been of no use to the world during my life—it may be useful for something after my death."⁵

⁴ Allentown College of St. Francis de Sales, *Five-Year Plan, 1999-2004* (DeSales University, Trexler Library Archives, 1999).

⁵ André Ravier, *Francis de Sales: Sage and Saint*, trans. Joseph Bowler, O.S.F.S. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 41.

Also, while he was Bishop of Geneva, he personally championed the cause of research and religious literacy in three important ways. First, he directed the continuing education of his diocesan clergy,⁶ whom he implored “to attend seriously to study, because knowledge, to a priest, is the eighth sacrament of the hierarchy of the Church.”⁷ Second, he established a catechism confraternity and personally conducted the lessons,⁸ even to the point of creating a type of sign language to teach prayers to a deaf member of his household staff. Finally, when John Anthony Baranzano, a priest teaching in his diocese, was challenged about promoting a heliocentric cosmology, the bishop publicly defended the methodology proper to scientific reasoning, as distinct from knowledge gained through faith.⁹

De Sales’ keen interest in education, both secular and religious, also assumed an institutional form. At that time in Europe, academies were the predominant venue for intellectual endeavors, so the bishop undertook to establish his own. Together with Antoine Favre, the president of the Senate of Savoy, Francis de Sales founded the Florimontane Academy. Originating in Favre’s home, the academy named for the “flowers on the mountain” had as its aim the gathering of “flowers and fruits,”¹⁰ those of literature and of science, respectively. Its emblem was an orange tree with its colorful fruits, to which was later added the star of St. Francis de Sales’ coat of arms to symbolize the spiritual life that, in de Sales’ view, is a vital part of any good Christian place of learning.

Those household-quarters lessons were conducted “in theology or politics or philosophy or rhetoric or cosmography or geometry or arithmetic (and) the aesthetics of languages, especially French.”¹¹ Its founding members included the poet Honoré d’Urfé and Favre’s two sons, one of whom (Claude Favre de Vaugelas) would later serve as one of the original academicians in the renowned French Academy.

⁶ E.J. Lajeunie, O.P., *Saint Francis de Sales: The Man, the Thinker, His Influence*, trans. Rory O’Sullivan, O.S.F.S. (Bangalore, India: SFS Publications, 1987), vol. II, 35-38.

⁷ Francis de Sales, “Exhortation to Clerics,” *Oeuvres*, XXIII: 303-305. Translation at <http://www.desales.edu/assets/salesian/PDF/ExortationstoClerics.pdf>.

⁸ Lajeunie, *Saint Francis de Sales*, 64-71.

⁹ Alexander Pocetto, “Francis de Sales, the Galileo Affair, and the Autonomy of Modern Science” (paper presented at the International Patristics, Medieval and Renaissance Conference, Villanova University, 1999), <http://www.desales.edu/assets/salesian/PDF/PocettoGalileo.pdf>. “The saint’s support of the experimental method and of freedom of research in the natural sciences when threatened by an abuse of Church authority is very much in keeping with the official teaching of Vatican II on the autonomy of the secular disciplines.”

¹⁰ “Lettre au Baron Amédée de Villette,” *Oeuvres*, XIV, 36, note 60.

¹¹ “Statuts de l’Académie Florimontane,” *Oeuvres*, XXIV, 244-245.

Taking as its motto the biblical notion that “all things come to the one who does his best,”¹² the Florimontane Academy had for its purpose “the exercise of all virtue, the sovereign glory of God, the service of the most serene Princes, and public usefulness.”¹³ But what made it distinct was its emphasis on “devout humanism,” whose chief features are highlighted in this depiction of one of its cofounders:

In a word, our Blessed Father [Francis de Sales] has been, in every sense of the term, one of the more illustrious representatives of that humanism which... is characterized by the dominant wish, with respect to the acting of man and in man of that which makes him truly human—not only living in service of a species, nor working in service of an enterprise, nor even citizen in service of the city, but intelligent and free creature, called to a spiritual destiny, to a life of society, not only with those similar to himself, but, for the Christian, with God himself.¹⁴

The original Florimontane Academy ceased its activities in 1610 when the Senate of Savoy was relocated to Chambéry. However, its form has been taken up again in France in the work of a newer Académie Florimontane, founded in 1851, and in the Académie Salésienne, founded in 1878. The conceptualization of this founding academy and the newer academies provided the impetus for the planned work of the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture at DeSales University.

As the establishment of the Florimontane Academy issued from the friendship and zeal for learning of its founders, so the Salesian Center has come into existence in a collaborative effort of the religious congregation of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales and the lay personnel of DeSales University. As the purpose of the Florimontane Academy was to combat heresy through the promotion of devout humanism, so the Salesian Center engages the thought of modern culture in a dialogue with faith. And, as the development of the Florimontane Academy owed its success to the infusion of gospel values in all secular spheres of living, so the Salesian Center mediates the advancement of culture by bringing the charism of Salesian Christian Humanism to bear upon contemporary academic disciplines.

¹² Ibid., 246; cf. 1 Cor 12:31.

¹³ Ibid., 242.

¹⁴ L. Hennequin, “Saint François de Sales et l’Humanisme,” *Notes Salésiennes, Supplément trimestriel au bulletin circulaire de la Société des Prêtres de Saint-François de Sales* 14 (Nov. 1932): 230.

Established as an administratively distinct unit within the university,¹⁵ the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture pursues this humanistic tradition today through educational initiatives that deal with the integration of faith and reason in modern life, through dialogue opportunities that explore the impact of spirituality on contemporary concerns, and through public partnerships that foster the link between faith and culture.

In the ten years since its inception, the work of the Salesian Center has undergone remarkable growth. From modest beginnings that included one series of breakfast meetings for community professionals and one series of campus dialogues about *Ex corde Ecclesiae* during the 2000-2001 academic year, the center now sponsors eighty-five programs and activities that engage more than 2,200 people annually. In addition, the Center, which had published only one work, now supports an electronic library with hundreds of texts and links to academic studies, public lectures, and cultural commentaries. When one considers the 700% increase in programs, participants, and publications during its first decade of operation—supported by a growth in endowments from \$300,000 to \$3.5 million—the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture has clearly been successful in terms of its business plan. Its real value, however, lies in its ability to assist the university to become who it is in terms of its unique mission.

Engaging the Salesian Charism in the World of Higher Education

The university's mission is rooted in the educational and spiritual legacy of the university's patron. One of de Sales' enduring insights—upon which he expounded in his classic book, *Introduction to the Devout Life*^{15a}—is that holiness is not contrary to or in competition with the challenges of everyday existence. He taught that holiness should infuse all dimensions of human action and interaction, most especially the day-to-day responsibilities that one's personal vocation entails—a teaching

¹⁵ In terms of organizational structure, the center operates as an entity independent of both the Student Affairs division (responsible for extra-curricular programming) and the Academic Affairs division (responsible for credit programming). It has no structural connection to any academic department. The director of the center reports directly to the president of the university and is an *ex officio* member of the president's cabinet.

^{15a} *Oeuvres*, III. English translation, with an introduction and notes, by John K. Ryan (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

known more popularly since Vatican II as the “universal call to holiness.”¹⁶

This seminal teaching was highlighted by Pope John Paul II in a letter on the fourth centenary of de Sales’ episcopal ordination:

With a particularly voluminous correspondence, [de Sales] also accompanied with great discernment and a gradual pedagogy adapted to each situation, appropriately using highly colored images, the souls who entrusted themselves to his spiritual direction.... Since he was passionately in love with God and man, his attitude to people was fundamentally optimistic and he never failed to invite them, to use his own words, to flourish where they were sown.... [H]is teaching as a priest and bishop finds an echo in the human heart and has an affinity with the deepest human aspirations.¹⁷

The pedagogical approach of St. Francis de Sales and the teachings he elaborated now form a distinctive strand of Christian Humanism that focuses on wisdom as guided, always and everywhere, by love that is imbued with an imperturbable optimism, lived with characteristic humility and gentleness, and expressed in words of inspired common sense.¹⁸ This wisdom is based on a deep appreciation of the love that God has showered upon the world through the gifts of creation and of human life, particularly in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a wisdom that gives rise to a particular worldview, one that sees beauty and goodness as the hallmarks of our existence, as gifts born from God’s deep and abiding love for each person. In the Salesian perspective, human beings, enabled and ennobled by divine love, are capable of much more than might well be imagined. They are capable of living a true life of devotion in the midst of worldly pursuits. They are capable of giving

¹⁶ Pope Paul VI, “Sabaudiae Gemma,” <http://www.desales.edu/assets/salesian/PDF/PaulVI-Sabaudiae.pdf>, ¶5. “No one of the recent Doctors of the Church more than St. Francis de Sales anticipated the deliberations and decisions of the Second Vatican Council with such a keen and progressive insight. He renders his contribution by the example of his life, by the wealth of his true and sound doctrine, by the fact that he has opened and strengthened the spiritual ways of Christian perfection for all states and conditions in life.”

¹⁷ Pope John Paul II, “Letter on the Fourth Centenary of the Episcopal Ordination of St. Francis de Sales,” http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_20021209_francesco-sales_en.html, sec 4.

¹⁸ See Wendy Wright, “François de Sales: Gentleness and Civility,” in *The Spirituality of Western Christendom, II: The Roots of the Modern Christian Tradition*, ed. Ellen Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 124-144.

birth, through faith, to a new culture of life and of love.¹⁹ The mission of DeSales University guides students to appreciate and activate these capabilities.

In today's world of higher education, the mission of any Catholic college or university at its best has been articulated by John Paul II in terms of the engagement between faith and culture. He describes this interaction as an encounter "between the unfathomable richness of the salvific message of the Gospel and the variety and immensity of the fields of knowledge in which that richness is incarnated."²⁰ Institutions of Catholic higher education invest in this richness not only by advancing research, as does any university, but also by aiding students to ascertain meaning, especially the meaning of being human, in a community of persons in which that meaning is realized and expressed. As John Paul II explained it:

In the world today, characterized by such rapid developments in science and technology, the tasks of a Catholic University assume an ever greater importance and urgency. Scientific and technological discoveries create an enormous economic and industrial growth, but they also inescapably require the correspondingly necessary search for meaning in order to guarantee that the new discoveries be used for the authentic good of individuals and of human society as a whole. If it is the responsibility of every University to search for such meaning, a Catholic University is called in a particular way to respond to this need...²¹

Centers and institutes enable a Catholic university to answer this call and respond to this need by focusing their work directly on the interplay of knowledge and meaning in areas of particular concern or interest.

Some centers / institutes reflect a concern for perpetuating the distinct spiritual tradition connected with the university, such as that of the Vincentians (at DePaul University and St. John's University in New York), the Augustinians (at Merrimack College and Villanova University), or the Jesuits (at Boston College and Marquette University). Others have focal points related to specific issues, as, for example, in the Duquesne University Family Institute or the Center for Catholic School Effectiveness at Loyola University in Chicago. Many bring their religious

¹⁹ Thomas Dailey, *Praying with Francis de Sales* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1997), 13.

²⁰ Pope John Paul II, "Ex corde Ecclesiae: On Catholic Universities," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae_en.html, sec 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, sec 7.

focus to bear upon society as a whole, such as the Kripke Center for the Study of Religion and Society at Creighton University, the Thomas More Center for the Study of Catholic Thought and Culture at Rockhurst University, or the Garaventa Center for Catholic Intellectual Life and American Culture at the University of Portland.

At DeSales University, the Salesian Center deals with both the spiritual and intellectual links between faith and culture in a variety of formats within the previously mentioned three areas of programming: educational initiatives, dialogue opportunities, and partnership ventures. Each area includes both stand-alone events, such as lectures and presentations, and multisession series by way of meetings, workshops, and courses. In addition, each area includes programming that reaches out to diverse audiences, whether students alone, the entire campus community, or the general public.

Whatever the format, the programs and activities of the Salesian Center work toward accomplishing three overarching educational goals: to investigate and disseminate Salesian spirituality, to foster the mutual engagement of faith and reason, and to contribute to the formation of ethical leaders. More generally, the center strives to promote values essential to a “culture of life” and to create means for the university to make a positive social impact. The extent to which the Salesian Center has been successful in fulfilling these goals is not yet fully known, but a recent effort to assess its impact was launched at the conclusion of its ten-year anniversary in the Fall 2010 semester.

Assessing the Salesian Center’s Work

A brief, online survey was distributed to all contacts on the center’s database for its monthly electronic newsletter. An e-mail invitation to participate in the survey reached 1,447 contacts, and of those reached, 481 (33%) opened the invitation. Of those who opened the invitation, 197 (41%) clicked through to the online survey instrument and 170 (86%) of those who reached the online survey completed the survey. A comparison of these response rates to others in the same industry demonstrates that participation in the Salesian Center’s survey was significantly high.²²

²² The invitation was distributed through Constant Contact, an e-mail marketing company, which reports that in the field of “Education and Services” the average open rate is only 18.6% and the click-through rate is only 15.1%.

Table 1. Demographic Information (n = 170).

<i>Q1—How have you been affiliated with Salesian Center for Faith and Culture?</i> (select one)	
Current student	20 (11.8%)
DSU alumnus	55 (32.4%)
DSU faculty / staff	37 (21.8%)
Donor	6 (3.5%)
Community member	52 (30.6%)
<i>Q2—How have you been engaged with the work of the Salesian Center? (select all that apply)</i>	
Teaching, directing, leading a program	15 (9.1%)
Serving on a board / committee	36 (21.8%)
Contributing financially	33 (20.0%)
Participating in multisession programs	75 (45.5%)
Attending single session or events	125 (75.8%)
<i>Q3—In approximately how many activities of the Salesian Center have you participated?</i>	
None	6 (3.6%)
One to ten	101 (60.1%)
Eleven to twenty-five	40 (23.8%)
Twenty-six to fifty	10 (6.0%)
More than fifty	11 (6.5%)

The survey included three questions designed to give a demographic snapshot of participants in the survey (see Table 1 above). Seven questions formulated with Likert-scale options were designed to gauge educational, attitudinal, and behavioral impacts connected with the Salesian Center's goals. An open-ended question providing an opportunity to fill in additional comments concluded the survey. Anonymous responses were permitted, yet they were limited to a one-week reply period.

Admittedly, the survey questions did not provide detailed measures, neither did they allow for complex analysis. Moreover, participation in the survey was self-selected, and all responses were self-reported. Nevertheless, this initial attempt at assessing the accomplishment of the Salesian Center's goals yielded strong support and positive results.

With regard to dissemination of the university's spiritual tradition, the major initiatives of the Salesian Center include on-campus orientation workshops, off-campus presentations by staff members, noncredit enrichment courses offered online, sponsorship of the university's annual Heritage Week celebrations, and the maintenance of an electronic library of more than 220 Salesian publications, 55% of which were authored or translated by members of the Salesian Center.

Table 2. Learning about Salesian Spirituality.

<i>Q4—From your participation in the work of the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture, to what extent have you learned something about St. Francis de Sales and/or the Salesian spiritual tradition?</i>	
Not at all	4 (2.4%)
Only a little	35 (20.6%)
A good amount	84 (49.4%)
A significant amount	47 (27.6%)

Learning about Salesian Spirituality

These various modes of sharing the Salesian spiritual tradition seem to be working, though detailed metrics on the number of visitors to the center’s virtual library are not yet available. Survey responses indicate that 77% of participants acknowledge having learned a good to significant amount about the Salesian tradition (see Table 2 above).

Two comments are indicative of the influence that learning experiences in the Salesian tradition had on the students’ lives. An online student wrote:

I took that course six years ago and am still finding practical applications to what I learned from that course. It was extremely helpful in my personal spiritual life, and the energy I get from my spiritual life flows into my professional life as a classroom teacher.

In addition, an unidentified respondent noted:

St. Francis believed in finding the good in people. Too often today we start an opinion on the basis of our differences. Whether it is a Forum (for Ethics in the Workplace) event, board meeting, (or) letter to the editor, the underlying sense you get from the Salesian Center is one of respect for each other and finding the good in other people.

Faith and Reason

With regard to the integration of faith and reason, a characteristic feature of all Catholic higher education, the survey reveals an 80% growth in learning (see Table 3 below).

While each of the Salesian Center’s activities may be said to facilitate this integration, one program in particular has this for its central purpose. The Faith and Reason Honors Program offers select scholarship students the opportunity to participate in a four-year program of seminars, cultural experiences, and independent study projects that

Table 3. Integrating Faith and Reason.

<i>Q5—From your participation in the work of the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture, to what extent have you learned something about the integration of faith and reason?</i>	
Not at all	3 (1.8%)
Only a little	31 (18.2%)
A good amount	78 (45.9%)
A significant amount	58 (34.1%)

explore the “big questions” identified in John Paul II’s encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio*. The program consists of one-credit “conversations” each semester (on Personhood, God, the World, Beauty, Truth, and Goodness) and culminates with the research and writing of an honors thesis. One alumnus offers a descriptive summary of the program’s impact on the life of a college student:

To enter a group ... to learn and discuss issues of all sorts through the lens of faith and reason was a constant reminder of the importance of the integration [of the two]. In life, and especially in a college setting, we wear many hats and are constantly bombarded with things that, while we experience them, may seem to be the most important issue in our lives at the moment. To integrate all these things into a unified understanding of God and the [w]orld not only eases the mind, but the body and the emotions as well. I remember often leaving class with a feeling of openness and contentment. The faith and reason seminars were and continue to be[,] for me, like a voice saying, “Do you see all these things you’ve learned? Don’t worry, and don’t be afraid to explore them. They are all elements of the same world and the same God. Do not build walls around the dry reservoir of your faith. Rather, dig the channels that will fill it from the multitude of sources [that] are so close by.”

Among the successful alumni of the honors program are attorneys, teachers, physicians, nurses, and even two seminarians.

Forming Ethical Leaders

The Salesian Center has had, potentially, its broadest influence in the area of the formation of ethical leaders who will put the engagement of faith and culture into practice. While 76% of all respondents acknowledged educational gains in this area (see Table 4 below), two programs, in particular, have yielded strong results: the Salesian Leadership Institute and the Forum for Ethics in the Workplace.

Operating within the framework of Catholic spirituality as lived in the Salesian tradition, the Salesian Leadership Institute is a two-year program of personal growth and executive training for undergraduates. As one of the forty-seven alumni of the institute explains:

Table 4. Forming Ethical Leaders.

Q6—From your participation in the work of the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture, to what extent have you learned something about ethical leadership?

Not at all 7 (4.1%)

Only a little 34 (20.0%)

A good amount 71 (41.8%)

A significant amount 58 (34.1%)

The idea of Salesian leadership impacted the way I served as a campus leader while at DeSales. It helped me to realize that the success of leadership should not just be measured on the “traditional” quantitative, business-like measures. Rather, I tried to focus more on the people [with whom] I worked ... and fostering positive relationships with them....Now as I reflect on it, this relationship-focused perspective and behavior has also carried into my working life. Seemingly “small” projects can make a big difference, as long as you make motivating people the focus of your leadership initiatives.

The initial success of this people-focused training has been recognition by the Ryan Family Foundation, whose financial support now covers all costs of the Institute each year.

Several activities at the Center focus specifically on ethics formation. For example, the Forum for Ethics in the Workplace, a nonprofit subsidiary of the university under the management of the Salesian Center, has for its mission “to provide opportunities for people to come together for study, reflection, conversation, and action on ethical issues in the workplace, especially in the Greater Lehigh Valley.”²³ One respondent describes the educational impact of the Forum’s quarterly ethics breakfast series:

Through discussions of ethics with other business people, I realized I (and a lot of others around me) were trying to evade issues in the workplace that concerned our faiths. Sort of the separation of church and state. We learned [that] it’s okay to bring faith in...and even better to be honest about it.

Beyond providing affirmation to individuals, the Forum now offers public recognition of the value of ethics in the workplace through its annual presentation of the Societas Award for responsible corporate behavior.

In sum, the survey and students’ comments suggest that learning outcomes relative to Salesian spirituality, faith and reason, and ethical leadership are being accomplished.

²³ As stated on the Forum’s web pages, <http://www.desales.edu/default.aspx?pageid=10389>.

Table 5. Changes in Attitudes.

<i>Q7—From your participation in the work of the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture, how has your attitude toward fostering a “culture of life” been affected?</i>	
Positively (strengthened)	143 (85.1%)
Negatively (weakened)	0
Not at all (no perceptible change)	25 (14.9%)
<i>Q8—From your participation in the work of the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture, how has your attitude toward engaging in social or political concerns been affected?</i>	
Positively (strengthened)	130 (77.8%)
Negatively (weakened)	1 (0.6%)
Not at all (no perceptible change)	36 (21.6%)

Changes in Attitudes

In addition to these aforementioned goals, the Salesian Center seeks to have a positive impact on the attitudes and behaviors of participants. Identifying changes in these areas may be more nebulous than demonstrating achievements in learning; nonetheless, as Tables 5 (above) and 6 (below) summarize, a significant majority of respondents claim positive gains.

Several respondents wrote about attitudinal change as a result of participating in the center’s Baranzano Society, an association of academic scholars and healthcare professionals who explore the mutual and dynamic interchange between science and religion, especially concerning social issues in the realm of bioethics. As one alumna who has entered this field explains:

As a physician, I have observed how sad it is that in the pursuit of science, many professionals forget how important the incorporation of faith is in the lives of many patients. I...strive to treat my patients the best I can medically but also realize the great connection that can be made through faith and the significant role it has in the medical profession.

Behavioral Changes

Concerning behavioral change related to faith and culture, an even larger number of participants expressed a positive change.

While specific developments mentioned were quite varied, two summary comments reflect gains in this area and serve well as concluding remarks for this assessment of the overall work of the Salesian Center. The first specifies a range of concerns dealt with in the center’s programming:

Table 6. Changes in Behavior.

<i>Q9—From your participation in the work of the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture, how has your behavior in relation to God (i.e., matters of faith) been affected?</i>	
Positively (strengthened)	136 (80.9%)
Negatively (weakened)	0
Not at all (no perceptible change)	32 (19.2%)
<i>Q10—From your participation in the work of the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture, how has your behavior in relation to other people (i.e., matters of culture) been affected?</i>	
Positively (strengthened)	144 (85.7%)
Negatively (weakened)	0
Not at all (no perceptible change)	24 (14.3%)

The work of the Salesian Center has helped me find the language and connection points to be a better voice in the public square. Our modern culture needs the dialectic between faith and culture, religion and science, prayer and social action that is the hallmark of the Salesian Center. I am more likely to be a relevant voice in the community on cultural issues because of...the Salesian Center's optimistic and practical approach.

The second comment highlights the distinctive elements of the Center's tradition and its approach:

In my role of Leadership in my Religious Community, I am ever mindful of St. Francis de Sales' precept to exercise leadership by love rather than dictate—gentleness and courtesy being the trademark of a Salesian community.

Ultimately, this behavioral dimension carries on the “devout” or virtue-based living that is at the core of Salesian spirituality.

Summary and Conclusions

Despite being indirect in type and general in nature, the foregoing assessment indicates that the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture is functioning to assist DeSales University in actualizing its educational mission. In doing so, it thereby contributes to the Church's pastoral approach to culture. That approach recognizes that “[t]omorrow's world depends on today's education, and education cannot be seen merely as a transmission of knowledge. It forms people and prepares them for their participation in social life by fostering their psychological, intellectual, cultural, moral, and spiritual maturity.”²⁴ Beyond this “catholic” approach

²⁴ Pontifical Council for Culture, “Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture,” http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/cultr/documents/rc_pc_pc-cultr-doc_03061999_pastoral_en.html, sec.16.

typical of other institutions, the Salesian Center's engagement with faith and culture contributes to the particular mission of *this* Catholic university both by embodying the Salesian perspective in its methodology and by advancing the Salesian tradition in its works. Bringing the consideration of a "devout life" to bear on any / all fields of human endeavor accomplishes the former, while the latter involves the study, translation, and presentation of Salesian texts.

While the center at DeSales University focuses on the Salesian charism and tradition, three lessons learned in its first decade of operation may assist other institutions in developing similar institutes. First, the decision to make the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture an entity independent of existing administrative structures gave the center the freedom to develop its own identity. Not aligned with any academic department, the center's identity is not bound to a particular subject area, such as Theology. Not subject to the academic administration, the center is free to pursue links beyond academic affairs, to include student affairs, public events, and community interests. Organizationally, the director of the center reports directly to the president of the university, which, from the start, positioned the Salesian Center as central to the work of the university.

Second, the interdisciplinary focus of the Salesian Center gives broader appeal to its work. Repeating the metaphor introduced earlier, the center acts as the "hub" of the university's wheel, linking the various spokes (academic affairs, student affairs, outreach to the community, etc.) in ways that no single department of the university could or would. Theoretically, this focus allows the center's programs and activities to cross traditional boundaries and thereby expand the horizon with which issues of faith and culture are regularly considered. Practically, it led to the decision to appeal to many audiences, by offering a variety of smaller programs rather than organizing larger, singular events.

Third, and most significant, this center's intentional effort to disseminate the Salesian charism provides clear direction to the work that it does. What makes any university distinct in the world of higher education is not simply the reputation of its programs or the quality of its facilities. Rather, beyond providing higher education, however that is conceived in terms of curricula, the work of any university is qualified by its own particular identity and mission. Whereas some centers and institutes focus on particular areas of academic inquiry, our decision to focus on the spiritual charism more so than on subject areas was intentional. Especially for a Catholic college or university, the charism that gave impetus to its establishment will no longer be continued through

osmosis from the members of the founding religious congregation, whose numbers are everywhere in decline. Thus, it becomes imperative to create mechanisms by which to hand on the understandings and traditions that give the college or university its distinctive identity and mission.

In this respect, the best evaluation of the impact that any center or institute can have on the educational mission of the university will be measured by the lives it helps to form, a measure that is still years in the making. Through its efforts, the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture adds value to DeSales University and makes a difference on campus and in the community, a difference that can be seen in terms of three critical areas that remain central to Catholic higher education.

First, the center enables the university to be an educational apostolate that represents a distinct spiritual charism. Whether through orientations for all employees working at the university or through online course offerings to people dwelling beyond the university's campus, the Salesian Center provides an intellectual introduction to the living legacy of its patron saint. For an institution whose sponsoring religious congregation, like those of other Catholic colleges, is dwindling in numbers, the center acts as a repository for the enduring values that this spirituality offers in the universal Church, and its work shares that religious tradition with future generations.

Second, the center facilitates the primary work of a Catholic university, namely, its search for truth. Whether engaging controversial subjects from diverse points of view or celebrating the connection between knowledge and religion through professional partnerships, the Salesian Center provides numerous means of dialogue by which reason and faith can together pursue meaning, both for individuals and for society. At an institution whose patron is recognized for his legal education, for his political prudence, for his pioneering work in education, for his literary genius, and, ultimately, for his sainthood—this center's activities represent and promote the “uni-diversity” that lies at the heart of Catholic higher education.²⁵

Finally, the center models the work of collaborative outreach that Catholic universities value in today's world of higher education. Whether by bringing together interdisciplinary teams of faculty for research

²⁵ St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, trans. Dom Henry Benedict Mackey, O.S.B. (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1997), 66-69. Here De Sales posits the great diversity of human faculties and actions within the unity of God's being and the singular act of divine love.

and discussion or by connecting faculty and staff with professionals in the field through innovative partnerships, the Salesian Center provides for educational encounters in person and online, the latter technology being a modern-day example of Salesian innovativeness in social communications.²⁶ For a university whose stated mission is to impart knowledge about and develop talents for personal, familial, and societal living, the center's prominence remains central to a core value of the institution and of the spirituality that informs it, namely, the relationships one has with other people and with God.²⁷ In other words, the Salesian Center for Faith and Culture at DeSales University assists not only the constituents of this university, but also the institution itself, to become who we are and to be that well.

²⁶ Cf. Herbert Winklehner, "Die erfolgreiche Presseaktion," *Licht: Die Salesianische Zeitschrift* (Jan/Feb 2003), trans. Eugene Kelly, ed. Thomas Dailey, <http://www.desales.edu/assets/salesian/library/Winklehner.pdf>.

²⁷ See Joseph Chorprenning, O.S.F.S., ed., *Human Encounter in the Salesian Tradition: Collected Essays Commemorating the 4th Centenary of the Initial Encounter of St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal* (Rome: International Commission for Salesian Studies, 2008).